

## IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Original): Process for the continuous manufacture of an austenitic stainless steel strip (3) having a dull surface appearance with a brightness of less than 30 and an arithmetic mean roughness Ra of greater than  $0.12\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ , of the annealed/pickled type, comprising the steps consisting in:

- subjecting a cold-rolled austenitic stainless steel strip (3) to a heat treatment in a bright annealing furnace (1) inside which a flushing gas chosen from inert or reducing gases, having a dew point above  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$  circulates, said flushing gas optionally comprising less than 1% oxygen by volume or less than 1% air by volume, said heat treatment comprising a heating phase at a heating rate V1, a soak phase at a temperature T for a soak time M, followed by a cooling phase at a cooling rate V2, in order to obtain a strip (3) covered with an oxide layer; and
- pickling the strip (3) having undergone the heat treatment, using an acid pickling solution suitable for completely removing said oxide layer according to its thickness and its nature.

Claim 2 (Currently Amended): Process according to Claim 1, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the dew point of said flushing gas is between  $-10$  and  $30^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

Claim 3 (Currently Amended): Process according to Claim 2, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the dew point is between  $-5$  and  $10^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

Claim 4 (Currently Amended): Process according to ~~any one of Claims Claim 1 to 3,~~  
~~characterized in that~~ wherein said flushing gas is at least one gas chosen from the group of  
gases consisting of argon, hydrogen, and nitrogen ~~and mixtures thereof.~~

Claim 5 (Currently Amended): Process according to ~~any one of Claims Claim 1 to 4,~~  
~~characterized in that~~ wherein the heat treatment of the strip (3) is carried out at a rate V1 of  
greater than 10°C/s, a soak temperature T between 1050 and 1150°C, a soak time M between  
1 s and 120 s and said strip (3) is cooled at a rate V2 of greater than 10°C/s down to a  
temperature of 200°C or below.

Claim 6 (Currently Amended): Process according to ~~any one of Claims Claim 1 to 5,~~  
~~characterized in that~~ wherein the heat treatment of the strip (3) is carried out using an  
induction heating device.

Claim 7 (Currently Amended): Process according to ~~any one of Claims Claim 1 to 5,~~  
~~characterized in that~~ wherein the heat treatment of the strip (3) is carried out using a  
resistance heating device.

Claim 8 (Currently Amended): Process according to ~~any one of Claims Claim 1 to 7,~~  
~~characterized in that~~ wherein the pickling solution is chosen from aqueous solutions  
comprising at least one acid selected from the group of acids consisting of nitric acid,  
hydrofluoric acid ~~and/or~~ and sulphuric acid.

Claim 9 (Currently Amended): Process according to Claim 8, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the pickling solution is chosen from aqueous solutions comprising hydrofluoric acid and nitric acid, and aqueous solutions comprising hydrofluoric acid and ferric ions  $\text{Fe}^{3+}$ .

Claim 10 (Currently Amended): Process according to Claim 9, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the pickling solution is an aqueous solution containing 10 to 80 g/l hydrofluoric acid and 60 to 140 g/l nitric acid.

Claim 11 (Currently Amended): Process according to Claim 10, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the pickling solution is an aqueous solution containing 30 to 50 g/l hydrofluoric acid and 80 to 120 g/l nitric acid.

Claim 12 (Currently Amended): Process according to Claim 9, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the pickling solution is an aqueous solution containing 5 to 100 g/l hydrofluoric acid and 1 to 150 g/l ferric ions.

Claim 13 (Currently Amended): Process according to Claim 12, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the pickling solution is an aqueous solution containing 30 to 80 g/l hydrofluoric acid and 30 to 50 g/l ferric ions.

Claim 14 (Currently Amended): Process according to ~~any one of Claims~~ Claim 1 to 13, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein, in order to pickle the austenitic stainless steel strip (3), said strip is sprayed with the acid pickling solution.

Claim 15 (Currently Amended): Process according to ~~any one of Claims~~ Claim 1 to 13, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein, in order to pickle the austenitic stainless steel strip (3), said strip (3) is immersed in a pickling bath containing said acid pickling solution.

Claim 16 (Currently Amended): Process according to ~~any one of Claims~~ Claim 1 to 15, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the temperature of the pickling solution is between 20 and 100°C.

Claim 17 (Currently Amended): Process according to Claim 16, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the temperature of the pickling solution is between 50 and 80°C.

Claim 18 (Currently Amended): Process according to ~~any one of Claims~~ Claim 1 to 17, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the time during which the strip is in contact with the pickling solution is between 10 s and 2 min.